This year’s Ivan Allen Jr. Prize for Progress and Service recognizes an individual whose incredible career is larger than life. He is a sportsman who has won international championships… an entrepreneur who has launched and built successful companies… an astute businessman who has bought and sold companies… an environmentalist whose massive land holdings preserve wildlife habitat and conserve biodiversity… and a philanthropist whose gifts have reached breath-taking heights.

Ted Turner was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, but when he was nine years old, his family moved to Savannah, Georgia, opening the door for him to develop a life-long passion for sailing. He was soon competing in the junior program of the Savannah Yacht Club, and participated in the 1964 Olympic trials. But he is best known for his international sailing races. In 1977 he skippered the yacht *Courageous* to victory in the America’s Cup. Two years later, he won the Fastnet Race at the helm of the yacht *Tenacious*, despite a terrible storm that resulted in loss of life.

Ted Turner went to Brown University intending to major in the classics, but soon switched to economics, and his knack for that subject is reflected in his outstanding business career. At the age of 24, following graduation and service in the Coast Guard, his career was launched when he inherited a small outdoor advertising agency from his father.

Seven years later, he used the advertising agency, which he had built up, to acquire Channel 17, a small, independent Atlanta TV station that became WTBS. He quickly grasped the potential of new communications satellites and the opportunity offered by new cable systems that were cropping up across the nation and eager for content to fill their channels. He negotiated with them to carry his Atlanta station free, increasing both his viewership and his advertising revenues.

Ted Turner purchased the Atlanta Braves and Hawks in 1976 in part to provide sports programming for WTBS, and soon the teams had devoted fans across the nation in areas with no local franchises. But he also clearly enjoyed his involvement with the teams, especially the Braves. He was known to give the Braves’ manager an occasional day off so he could take the helm. “Managing isn’t that difficult,” he said. “You just have to score more runs than the other guy.” He still owned the Braves when they moved into the new stadium built for the 1996 Olympics, and it was subsequently named Turner Field in his honor.

As Ted Turner built his broadcast empire, he continued to use sports to attract a broad audience. Turner Network Television – known as TNT – featured NASCAR and the NBA, and created World Championship Wrestling. And he brought professional hockey back to Atlanta, naming his new franchise the Thrashers after the state bird of Georgia.

Ted Turner’s boldest broadcasting move came in 1980 when he launched CNN – the Cable News Network – the world’s first, live, 24-hour global news network. Establishing a worldwide
network that can cover the news live wherever on the planet it might occur is an incredibly ambitious undertaking. Many broadcasters doubted that it could be done. Among the network news gurus, the young CNN was regarded as something of a Rodney Dangerfield who “couldn’t get no respect.”

Ted Turner countered that CNN would not sign off until the world ended. “We’ll be on, and we will cover the end of the world, live,” he said, “and that will be our last event… and when the end of the world comes, we’ll play ‘Nearer My God to Thee’ before we sign off.”

But all it took was unprecedented 24-hour live coverage of a few momentous events like the explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger and the Persian Gulf War to bring CNN to the forefront as the premier news source to which both viewers and other news outlets now turn for the latest information.

Even as he was taking sports and news broadcasting to new heights, Ted Turner moved into a new arena – Hollywood. In 1986, he purchased the legendary but struggling MGM/United Artists Entertainment Company. He quickly sold most of the studios and film-making operations, but kept the huge film and TV library and used this asset to provide programming for the new cable channels he created over the next two decades.

In 1988, he introduced TNT by broadcasting Gone with the Wind from the MGM library. The Cartoon Network was launched in 1992 with the Looney Tunes, Merrie Melodies, and later the Hanna-Barbera collections. But even as he used the MGM library to fill a lot of programming hours, he gradually added newer reruns and even original programming.

During the mid-90s, he moved into production, acquiring Castle Rock Entertainment and New Line Cinema, and creating two independent companies – Ted Turner Pictures and Ted Turner Documentaries. These companies allowed him to dabble in acting, and he appeared in the films Gettysburg and Gods and Generals.

In October 1996, he made another characteristically bold business move, merging his company with Time Warner. And in 2001, Time Warner merged with AOL.

Ted Turner stepped down from the Time Warner Board in 2006, in part to devote more attention to yet another new business interest. In January 2002, he had opened the first Ted’s Montana Grill in Columbus, Ohio, together with George W. McKerrow, Jr., who had founded the Longhorn Steakhouse chain. Just as he had with TBS many years ago, he soon took the restaurant nationwide, and today there are more than 55 Ted’s Montana Grills – including several in Atlanta.

In fact, Atlanta has been the major beneficiary of most of his business endeavors, serving as the headquarters of his broadcasting empire and the home of his sports teams.

Today, he is chairman of Turner Enterprises, Inc., which manages his restaurants and other business interests, including his land holdings. As America’s largest private landowner, he holds approximately two million acres – including the nation’s largest privately-owned tract of land –
920 square miles of prime prairie land in New Mexico. His goal is to manage his land in a manner that is both economically and environmentally sustainable, and he owns the largest commercial herd of bison in North America, with more than 45,000 head.

Many people who have achieved great wealth, as Ted Turner has, use that wealth to escape from the problems of the world. And when you own more real estate than Delaware and Rhode Island combined, that might seem the obvious thing to do. But instead of escaping from the world, Ted Turner uses his wealth to engage with the world.

Ever since he staged the Goodwill Games in 1986 as a gesture of peace during the Cold War, he has combined philanthropy with his business interests. His passion for the environment, expressed in the management of his land holdings, is also well represented in his philanthropy. He created the Turner Foundation in 1990 to help improve air and water quality, develop sustainable energy sources, safeguard the environment, protect wildlife habitat, and curtail population growth.

Its companion is the Turner Endangered Species Fund, which conserves biodiversity and protects and restores endangered and imperiled species on Turner properties. He also created the superhero Captain Planet, producing two TV cartoon series about the environment. And in 1989, he awarded the Turner Tomorrow Fellowship, a $500,000 prize, to Daniel Quinn for *Ishmael*, a work of fiction offering positive solutions to global problems.

His biggest and boldest gift was made in 1997 – a pledge of $1 billion to be given through the United Nations Foundation to four core priorities – women and population, children’s health, the environment, and peace and security. And last year the UN Foundation passed the promised milestone of $1 billion in grants and awards.

Soon after making that gift, Ted Turner began meeting with fellow Georgian Sam Nunn, who had recently retired from the U.S. Senate, where he was the most respected voice on issues of security and national defense. Their discussions resulted in the Nuclear Threat Initiative, launched in early 2001 and funded in part by a gift of $45 million from Ted Turner. Today the NTI promotes a coordinated global response to the threat from nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

Sam Nunn is also a distinguished professor here at Georgia Tech’s School of International Affairs, which is named for him. And today we are hosting the biennial Sam Nunn Bank of America Forum to discuss how to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons as the world turns increasingly to nuclear energy in the face of climate change.

And now, Robert Edward Turner, for providing such an extraordinary model of philanthropy and visionary entrepreneurship, it is with enormous pleasure and immense pride that the Georgia Institute of Technology and its Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts present you with the 2008 Ivan Allen Jr. Prize for Progress and Service.

At this time I would like to ask Dean Sue Rosser and Ted Turner to join me at the podium for the presentation of the award.